



# WEST VIRGINIA INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

## The Fundamental Elements of a Trauma Informed System

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# Material for this Presentation Provided By:

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org) and <http://learn.nctsn.org>
- The NCTSN includes NCTSN Learning Center for Child and Adolescent Trauma
- The Chadwick Center at Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego, CA  
[www.chadwickcenter.org](http://www.chadwickcenter.org)



# Trauma Informed System

- A trauma-informed child- and family-service system is one in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, and service providers.



- Programs and agencies within such a system infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies and policies



- They act in collaboration with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to facilitate and support the recovery and resiliency of the child and family.



- screen for trauma exposure and related symptoms
- use culturally appropriate evidence-based assessment and treatment for traumatic stress and associated mental health symptoms



- make resources available to children, families, and providers on trauma exposure, its impact, and treatment
- engage in efforts to strengthen the resilience and protective factors of children and families impacted by and vulnerable to trauma



- address parent and caregiver trauma and its impact on the family system
- emphasize continuity of care and collaboration across child-service systems
- maintain an environment of care for staff that addresses, minimizes, and treats secondary traumatic stress, and that increases staff resilience



# What is a Trauma-Informed Child Serving System?

A Trauma-Informed Child-Serving System understands:

- 1) The potential impact of childhood traumatic stress on the children served by the system
- 2) How the system can either help mitigate the impact of trauma or inadvertently add new traumatic experiences
- 3) How to promote factors related to child and family resiliency after trauma

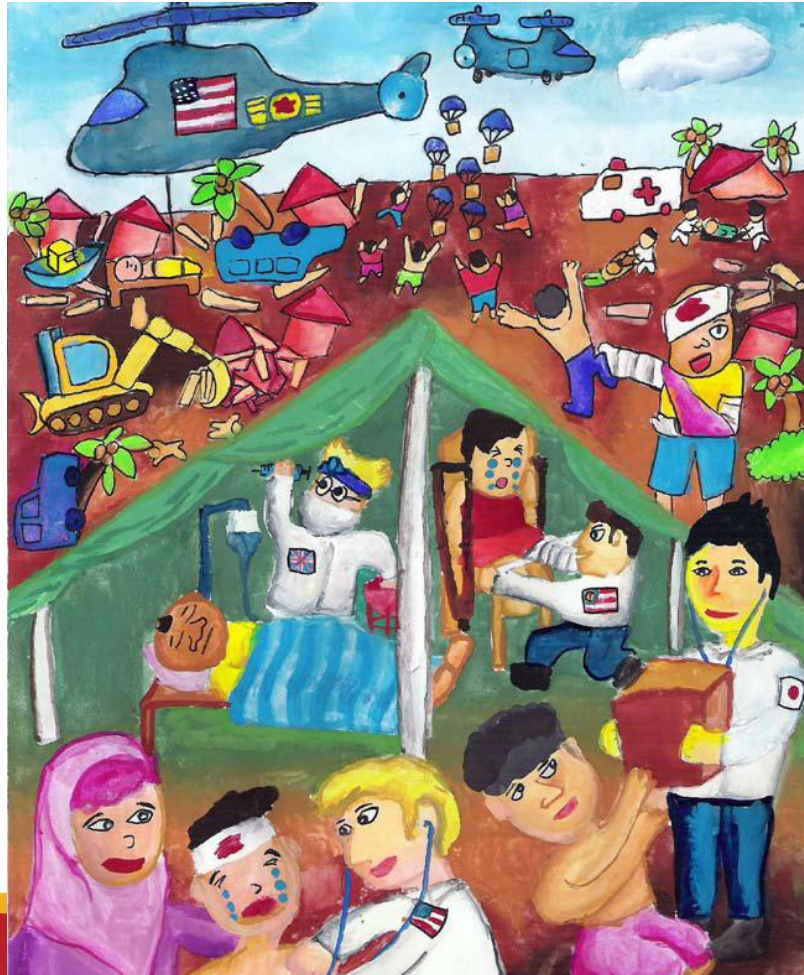


# What is a Trauma-Informed Child Serving System?

- 4) The potential impact of the current and past trauma on the families with whom it interacts
- 5) How adult trauma may interfere with adult caregivers' ability to care for and support their child
- 6) The impact of vicarious trauma on the child-serving workforce
- 7) That exposure to trauma is part of the job of protecting children



# What is Child Traumatic Stress?



Artwork courtesy of the International Child Art Foundation ([www.icafe.org](http://www.icafe.org))

# Types of Trauma

- **Acute trauma** is a single traumatic event that is limited in time
- **Chronic trauma** refers to the experience of multiple traumatic events
- **Complex trauma** describes both exposure to chronic trauma—usually caused by adults entrusted with the child's care—and the impact of such exposure on the child



# Situations That Can Be Traumatic

- • Physical or sexual abuse
- • Abandonment, betrayal of trust (such as abuse by a caregiver), or neglect
- • The death or loss of a loved one
- • Life-threatening illness in a caregiver
- • Witnessing domestic violence
- • Automobile accidents or other serious accidents
- • Bullying
- • Life-threatening health situations and/or painful medical procedures
- • Witnessing or experiencing community violence (e.g., drive by shooting, fight at school, robbery)
- • Witnessing police activity or having a close relative incarcerated
- • Life-threatening natural disasters
- • Acts or threats of terrorism



# What is Child Traumatic Stress?

- The physical and emotional responses of a child to events that threaten the life or physical integrity of the child or of someone critically important to the child (such as a parent or sibling)
- Traumatic events overwhelm a child's capacity to cope and elicit feelings of terror, powerlessness, and out-of-control physiological arousal
- Trauma is experienced as a series of traumatic moments each penetrating deep in the child's psyche



# Children Vary in Their Response to Traumatic Events

•The impact of a potentially traumatic event depends on several factors, including:

- The child's genetic makeup
- The child's age and developmental stage
- The child's perception of the danger faced
- Whether the child was the victim or a witness
- The child's relationship to the victim or perpetrator
- The child's past experience with trauma
- The adversities the child faces following the trauma
- The response to the events of the child's close caregivers
- The presence/availability of adults who can offer help and protection



# Cumulative Impact of Trauma

•Traumas build upon one another creating a cumulative impact upon a child's:

- Neurobiology
- Physiological Responses
- Response to his/her environment
- Ability to regulate emotions
- Judgment and cognitive processes used in learning and decision making
- Self concept and self-esteem
- Social relationships and ability to trust
- Worldview



# Effects of Trauma Exposure

- **Attachment:** Traumatized children feel that the world is uncertain and unpredictable. They can become socially isolated and can have difficulty relating to and empathizing with others.
- **Biology:** Traumatized children may experience problems with movement and sensation, including hypersensitivity to physical contact and insensitivity to pain. They may exhibit unexplained physical symptoms and increased medical problems.
- **Mood regulation:** Children exposed to trauma can have difficulty regulating their emotions as well as difficulty knowing and describing their feelings and internal states.



# Effects of Trauma Exposure

- **Dissociation:** Some traumatized children experience a feeling of detachment or depersonalization, as if they are “observing” something happening to them that is unreal.
- **Behavioral control:** Traumatized children can show poor impulse control, self-destructive behavior, and aggression towards others.
- **Cognition:** Traumatized children can have problems focusing on and completing tasks, or planning for and anticipating future events. Some exhibit learning difficulties and problems with language development.
- **Self-concept:** Traumatized children frequently suffer from disturbed body image, low self-esteem, shame, and guilt.



# Child Traumatic Grief

- Some children develop CTG after the death of a close friend or family member.
- Children who develop CTG experience the cause of death as horrifying or terrifying, whether the death was unexpected or due to natural causes.
- For some children and adolescents, responses to traumatic events can have a profound effect on the way they see themselves and their world.
- They may experience long-lasting changes in their: ability to trust others, sense of personal safety, effectiveness in navigating life challenges, and belief that there is justice or fairness in life.
- Many children who encounter a shocking or horrific death of another person will recover naturally and not develop ongoing difficulties. Every child is different in his or her reactions to a traumatic loss.



# Who Needs Trauma-Focused Treatment?

- Children who have experienced extreme trauma, such as a penetrating injury (gun shoot, stabbing, etc.) or sexual assault
- Children who are “re-experiencing” the traumatic events in their nightmares, in flashbacks, repetitive play, or those who react strongly to reminders of their trauma
- Children who are actively avoiding reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, etc.) of the trauma



# How Mental Health Counseling Can Help

- • Provide education about the impact of trauma
- • Help children and caregivers re-establish a sense of safety
- • Teach techniques for dealing with overwhelming emotional reactions
- • Provide an opportunity to talk about and make sense of the traumatic experience in a safe, accepting environment
- • When possible, involve primary caregivers in the healing process



